

Considerations on Death

By [William Dyer](#)

Containing several reasons why men fear death—and opposite reasons, by way of answer, why they should not fear it.

Objection 1. First, Because thereby we are deprived of the exercise of all our senses, so that whatever delights either our taste, smell, hearing, sight, or feeling has afforded us—we shall enjoy the same no more, while, perhaps, many generations after us shall have the fruition thereof!

Answer.

As the exercises of our senses afford opportunity of delight—so are they capable of annoying and grieving us. As the taste—by bitterness and sharpness; the smell—by noisome pollution, corruption; the hearing—by terrible and hideous noise, and evil tidings; the sight—by loathsome affrighting and miserable appearances; the feeling—by tedious pains, etc.

Again, we have had the benefit of surviving former generations, who were liable to what we are; and so shall those who shall follow us.

Objection 2. But that which aggravates the evil thereof, is a man's being cut off in the flower or strength of his age; whereas, if he lived the common age of man, he would the more contentedly leave this life.

Answer 1. Why, what is a man? Is he not as transient as the flower, and as the grass grass, and the wind? And are they not cut off in their best states? And may not God, when he walks in, or views his garden of human flowers, have as much liberty to crop them as men have of theirs? Surely, yes—for all are his!

Secondly, And though God permits some men to live as long as any ordinary course of nature ought, be it seventy years, (which is judged the most common) or more; yet he has not promised them so long life.

Thirdly, And though some live so long—yet considering the wars and plagues, and other diseases among men, it is not without reason that there are many more that die who have not lived according to the course of nature.

Fourthly, As we conclude that no person better, or so well as the gardener, or such as sowed, planted, dressed, and frequently practiced about the flowers and

plants, knows when, and for what reason, to gather and pluck up—so no person knows better, nor so well as God knows, when to cut or pluck up what he has planted in the world. He does all his actions upon good and weighty reasons, even greater and better than any gardener or other person has, for what he does in his world.

Objection 3. In death, a man becomes a loathsome spectacle to all beholders, insomuch that they find a dead and rotten corpse of a man, more foul and offensive than the most loathsome creature in the world. And is not that very grievous, to become from a delightful companion—an abhorrence of all people?

Answer 1. True, being dead, a man becomes a loathsome spectacle to all beholders. And do not many diseases, to which a man is incident in his life, effect the same in beholders?

Answer 2. Though man becomes loathsome by death—yet he has no sense thereof; and in that is the proverb verified, 'What the eye sees not—the heart rues not.' For look on man as a dead lump of corruption, and what of misery do we behold? We look on a dunghill says, "Alas! How foul!" But the dunghill neither feels nor knows not any foulness. Just so, although the thoughts of such a condition by death, grieves us while living—yet in that condition itself, we shall be free from such grief.

Answer 3. Again, consider that we were but earth before we had life— and being dead we return to our first estate! And though we become for a season more impure and corrupt than the earth—yet eventually we shall become dust, when the putrefaction has consumed. And in that sense (but especially in a more excellent) will that saying be fulfilled, to wit, "Corruption shall put on incorruption."

Objection 4. Death deprives man of his society, with whom he has had sweet converse.

Answer 1. True—but it is in order (if he dies in God's favor) to enjoy, in due season, better society than men on earth have.

Answer 2. Besides, as you lose your friends on earth—so you are rid of your enemies there too.

Objection 5. Though death may make way for better society than we have been used to here—yet who knows when that shall be; the body being not to receive new life until the general resurrection, which may be very long delayed.

Answer. Suppose it is so (as the most of Christians believe) that the best part of man receives glory and happiness immediately after death; yet, from the time of death to the general resurrection—the space between death and it is but one day; as he who being in a coma, sleeps many days and nights without waking,

cannot esteem of the time he has slept, answerable to the measure thereof—but it may be to him, as one day or night. And in this sense may death be reckoned (as usually it is in holy Scripture) a sleep.

Objection 6. Suppose a man should die by the hand of a cruel man-slayer, who delights in torturing and destroying the body of man; would not the thought of one so cruel, coming to act his mind upon a person, make the thoughts of such a death more terrible, when therein a man is no more regarded than a dog, or the vilest creature?

Answer 1. Yes—but do not many, by reason of wounds and gangrened members, in their life, for preserving the body, limbs, or members—endure as great pain, and tremble as much at the sight of the surgeon, when he comes to do his office on them, as a man does at the sight of the executioner to do his, and consider that all that is commonly done at such a death, causes less pain for the one—than what some suffer by cutting off one limb, in curing some wound or disease.

Answer 2. Again, consider the more of torment a man endures in this life, whether at death or otherwise, the less he is likely to suffer after this life; and the more blessing he is likely then to enjoy, if he is a good or worthy man, suffering here as a child of God, and not as a reprobate, Revelation 28:6 and 20:4 6.

Objection 7. But in our present estate we have being, life, sense, and reason; and in death, we shall have (at the most) only being; and is not that very grievous to consider, that we shall be reduced to no better a condition than a piece of earth or stone!

Answer. It is true, that the consideration thereof is very grievous in itself; but yet while man has reason as well as being, life, and sense—let him use it to consider also, that he has no more cause to complain, than for a piece of the earth he now treads on, if it should please God (as at the first) to create thereof a man like himself, and shortly reduce it to its former state; for thus it is now with mankind in general.

Objection 8. Although the miseries of man in this life are not many—yet if the benefits therein did not surmount those miseries, it is likely that men would not so much desire to continue therein, as they now do; and therefore, who would not fear death!

Answer 1. No man is able to say, how long a person, in order to be happy, should live here to enjoy his life; but God he knows, and he has appointed for men once to die; therefore rest satisfied in his wisdom, for disposing of your time for death, concluding that it shall be in its due season.

Answer 2. Again, consider that it is God's prerogative over all his creatures, to dispose of them how, and when he will.

Answer 3. Moreover, God has already set the bounds of your life, beyond which you can not pass; therefore, patiently commit yourself to him in well doing, and quietly satisfy yourself with his pleasure; for it is vain for a man to strive against the stream, by tormenting himself with that which he cannot avoid. Yet this does not hinder that all men may, yes, ought to use what lawful means God gives them opportunity of, for saving their lives.

Objection 9. Well, though it be granted, that these answers, which have been urged, have common reason and experience on their side; yet there remains further grounds to fear death, as well from what the holy Scriptures, as nature or custom does evidence; and that in part in this, to wit, death is reckoned the "king of terrors," as Job 18:14, compared with Hebrews 2:15.

Answer. Death is indeed granted to be the king of terrors—but that is in regard of a certain sting that is in it; if that sting is taken away, death will not be so terrible as before; yes, it will be rather gain than loss to die, if that sting does not reach the party dying.

Objection 10. I confess there may seem to be some comfort in that answer, if one knew how to escape that sting—but that is a thing so difficult, that I greatly fear death; if I were sufficiently provided in that case, I should have comfort.

Answer. It is true, that the difficulty lies even there where it is expressed; but though it is so difficult, yes, impossible with man—yet it is not so difficult with God. He has sufficiently provided for man in that case; for he who is King of kings, has subdued that king of terrors, and done what is needful for a man concerning the same; for which purpose see these Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, John 3:14-18, Romans 5:12, and forward to the end of the chapter.

Objection 11. I grant it appears plain enough, that there is, through Jesus Christ, victory wrought over death, the sting being taken away. I say, taken away from some—but not from all, because it is said, "the sting of death is sin" so that where sin is, there is the sting also; and I know myself a sinner, and therefore in danger of that sting.

Answer. Indeed, if you know yourself to be a sinner, and grieve not for it—but are therewith content, neither repenting of, nor reforming from it, I cannot say the sting of death is taking away from you. But if you truly repent of your sins, and endeavor with your heart to forsake sin—the sting of death is taken away from you. For the Scripture tell us, Christ died for sinners; that is to say, humble penitent sinners, not for obstinate ones. A notable example whereof was manifested, when the Savior of the world himself was crucified between the two

thieves; the one railed on Christ, and was reproved; the other humbled himself, he also prayed, and received the answer of salvation.

Objection 12. Indeed that example, methinks, does tend to prove what you say; but in so considerable a case as this, a man would desire more than one witness.

Answer. Therefore take more, namely, Proverbs 8:13, Isaiah 1:17-19, Matthew 9:12, 13, Romans 5:8, 1 Timothy 4:15, 16.

Here are some further grounds whereon a poor sinner may expect mercy, through the merits of Jesus Christ.

First, through a sense of sin, so look on the Lord Christ, as those who were stung with the scorpions in the wilderness did on the brazen serpent.

Next follows the humbling of the soul, the effects of which is to be seen in these Scriptures, namely, Job 22:29, Psalm 10:17, Isaiah 15:15, James 4:6.

Which humiliation begets a self-examination, by which knowing the holy rule of life, and comparing a man's life to that rule, trying how his case is, he is thereby ready to say, (in respect to his misery) as the apostle does, Romans 7:9-11.

He sees himself a dead man in the sense of the law.

Then that works in him a holy sorrow, and true repentance to salvation, 2 Corinthians 7:10, 11.

It brings him to see, not only that he is a condemned or guilty person—but that he is irrecoverably lost, and must needs perish, without some person as a mediator or redeemer, to undertake for his ransom. For God is infinitely just, and he must have his justice satisfied; and all that the poor soul can do, is but to amend his life for the future, walking more conformable to the righteous law of God than heretofore. But alas! that is no more than what we ought to be for the time to come; it will not satisfy divine justice for the transgression already done against the law of God. Neither, indeed, can a man of himself satisfy the justice of God, for what he shall owe to it in the remaining part of his life.

Now this consideration works the soul into a melting frame, brings him on his knees to say, as the poor publican, "Lord, have mercy upon me a sinner!" And as the humbled prodigal sees all his rambling shifts in vain, for yielding him the solid comfort his soul thirsts after, therefore resolves to go home to his father; and although he may look upon him as enraged against him, (for which his soul knew there was just cause) yet he goes humbling himself to his father, saying, "Father, I have sinned, and am no more worthy to be called your son." Now observe the success, "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." And further entertained him,

not as a servant, as he humbly besought, (for the humble shall be exalted) but as a son, and rejoiced in him, Luke 15:18-20.

The Assyrians also well knew what good this humble application for mercy was likely to effect in an Israelite king, 1 Kings 20:31, 32. And if mercy is expected from one of these kings, then much more may it be from the Supreme, the King of those kings, the Almighty who has promised large graces to humble souls.

So Esther, at the advice of Mordecai, chapter 4:5, made good proof of this humble way of addressing for mercy, in a case otherwise desperate; the success whereof was the royal scepter held forth with grace, to grant even beyond the petition, though she knew not when she went about it—but that she should perish; yet wisely perceiving that she must perish, if she had not so applied, she proceeded.

Thus it was with the four lepers, 2 Kings 7:4. If they went into the city, they would suffer famine—if they stayed where they were, they must die; they therefore ventured for relief among their enemies, being sure they could not be worse than they were, they could but die one way or another. So when the soul is thus brought to see its own misery, and humbles itself thoroughly, and is willing to embrace whatever means as have a possibility of saving it; then God shows his mercy to refresh it, according to Isaiah 57:15, 16, ec. "To revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones." So Psalm 11:15, Ezekiel 33:11 and forward.

And Christ comfortably invites such a poor sinner, who is weary and heavy laden with the sense of his sin—he invites him to come and receive rest; and thus the gospel does in general give encouragement to humble and penitent sinners, to expect salvation from the eternal God, the sting before spoken of being taken away.

Then being truly humbled under a sense of that miserable condition, which sin has made a man liable to, and being rightly desirous of salvation, that which is required of him, is only to believe that the righteous God, who might have made him eternally miserable—has, notwithstanding, through his tender compassions, (his mercy being above all his works) resolved on a way to satisfy his justice, by acquitting the guilty, who was no way able to pay a sufficient ransom for his own redemption, therefore provided a price satisfactory to redeem poor fallen man from the curse; concerning which, both the apostles and prophets have witnessed, Isaiah 53, Micah 5, Hosea 11:1, Psalm 22, Acts 1:8, and 10:41 and more Scriptures; that price of salvation, Jesus Christ; of whom the angels proclaimed, about the time of his entrance into the world, "Glory be to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men," Luke 2:14. And the evangelist John, declares positively, "That God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes on him, should not perish—but have eternal life."

This is the term of salvation, namely, believing in his Son to be that gift and ransom which the gospel generally holds forth to those who would know what they should do to be saved; withal there must be an obedient living, and that universally to all God's commandments, answerable to a poor soul's ability, so long as life may last.

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